

Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Cooperative Agreement for the Continued Operation of the Local Government Compliance Assistance Center

I. Summary

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has funded the development and operation of ten compliance assistance centers (centers) to help small and medium size businesses and local governments better understand and comply with environmental regulations. EPA seeks a partner for continued operation and maintenance of the compliance assistance center for local governments, currently operating as the Local Government Environmental Assistance Network (LGEAN). Proposals meeting the criteria discussed below must be delivered to EPA by 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, April 30, 2003.

II. Background

LGEAN was funded by a cooperative agreement that expired in September 2002. Under the Grants Competition Policy that went into effect October 1, 2002, EPA now competes any assistance agreement or grant that will provide the recipient more than \$75,000 in a year.

The local government compliance assistance center is intended as a “first-stop shop” that provides environmental management, planning, funding, and regulatory information useful to local government elected and appointed officials, managers and staff. The center’s environmental compliance information, tools, and services must be easy to read, easy to use, and tailored specifically to the environmental aspects of local government operations (i.e., wastewater treatment, solid waste disposal, building maintenance, drinking water provision, vehicle fleet operations, etc.).

To achieve this goal, the recipient must:

- Create Internet linkages and partnerships among the various local government groups/associations, EPA and other federal regulatory agencies, other relevant organizations, and the compliance assistance provider communities.
- Develop content (including, regulatory and pollution prevention information) that will address the needs of local governments.

EPA helped establish LGEAN and the nine other compliance assistance centers by sponsoring partnerships with industry, academics, stakeholder organizations, environmental groups, and other Agencies. The centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand, sector-specific compliance information, tools, and services. In 1997, after the extensive discussions with local government stakeholders identified the need for a local government compliance

assistance center, EPA awarded a cooperative agreement to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and six partner organizations: the Air and Waste Management Association, the American Waterworks Association, the Environmental Council of the States, the National Association of Counties, the Solid Waste Association of America, and the Water Environment Federation. This consortium, later expanded to include the International Municipal Lawyers Association and the Public Entity Risk Institute, currently operates the Local Government Environmental Assistance Network (LGEAN) and its website at www.lgean.org. ICMA worked with the LGEAN partners, the Environmental Protection Agency and various local government stakeholders to identify, develop, and post content that meets the environmental compliance needs of local governments. The web-site, and its associated toll-free telephone information service (1-877-865-4326), make it easier for local governments to learn about, understand, and comply with the environmental requirements that apply to their operations.

As stated above, the assistance agreement with ICMA and its LGEAN partners expired in September 2002. In accordance with EPA policy encouraging competition for assistance agreements, the Agency now seeks proposals from qualified applicants who can partner with the EPA, various local government support organizations, and other interested parties and who have the capability both to support the continued operation and maintenance of the local government environmental compliance center and to provide outreach efforts to local government entities.

In general, the centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand sector-specific compliance information. The centers offer a variety of services, including web-sites, e-mail groups, fax-back systems, and telephone assistance, depending on the needs of the sector they are designed for. All the centers help businesses, tribes, local governments, and federal agencies identify specific regulations that apply to their activities, improve compliance with environmental regulations, and learn about pollution prevention approaches that can save money and resources. All centers can be accessed at www.assistancecenters.net.

EPA reviewed the responses to its February 2003 Request for Initial Proposals, and determined that certain initial proposals met the eligibility criteria. EPA now seeks, by April 30, 2003, proposals from those eligible applicants for continued operation and maintenance of the local government compliance assistance center. EPA anticipates making approximately \$600,000 available over a five-year period for this purpose. EPA will partially fund each budget period and will consider funding the balance of budget requests contingent upon satisfactory progress as certified by the EPA Project Officer, the availability of funds, and EPA priorities.

III. Authority

EPA will, as its annual appropriation allows, award financial assistance to the successful applicant in the form of a cooperative agreement. As authorized by 31 U.S.C. §6305, EPA will be substantially involved in carrying out this project. Anticipated substantial involvement will

include collaboration in carrying out the scope of work, technical assistance, approval of the substantive terms of contracts and subawards made with EPA funds, change of key personnel, and approval of project phases prior to continuation of the project.

The Agreement will be funded on a “multimedia” basis under Section 103 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. §7403, Section 104 of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1254, and Section 8001 of the Solid Waste Disposal Act, 42 U.S.C. §6981. Applicants are encouraged to review these statutes and ensure that all of the activities contained in their proposals are consistent with the scope of EPA’s authority.

Funding for Compliance Assistance Centers is awarded under Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 66.305, Compliance Assistance- Support for Services to the Regulated Community and Other Assistance Providers.

IV. Applicant Eligibility

Only those applicants that have been invited to participate following the Request for Initial Proposals are eligible.

V. Overview of the Local Government Environmental Assistance Network

LGEAN provides information, tools, and services that facilitate environmental compliance, pollution prevention, environmental management systems, homeland security, and building financial capacity. LGEAN also provides regulatory updates, expert answers to environmental questions, a fax-back service, a consultants directory, webcast seminars and links to other services and sources of environmental information. Working with its partners and EPA, LGEAN acquires the most up-to-date environmental information and makes that information available to subscribers in regular e-mail updates. Environmental compliance information is made available in its original form and in plain-language versions. LGEAN invites comments and feedback from users to continually improve the content and usability of the web-site. Local officials can interact with their peers and others online at LGEAN, learn of the latest environmental developments, and access a calendar of events.

LGEAN development was possible in part through the financial resources of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These resources allowed ICMA and its partners to bring environmental compliance information to local governments and the public through a toll free number, the web-site, fact sheets, news updates, calendar of events, and other documents on the web-site.

The local government compliance assistance center is intended as a “first-stop shop” that provides environmental management, planning, funding, and regulatory information useful to local government elected and appointed officials, managers and staff. The center’s environmental compliance information, tools, and services should be easy to read, easy to use, and tailored specifically to the environmental aspects of local government operations,

LGEAN currently uses Cold Fusion. It has a minimum amount of broad band demand to promote quick loading. It has been tested for use on IE as well as Netscape. In the past there have been approximately 10,000 user sessions per month on www.lgean.org. (Note that this data is provided for informational purposes only. Applicants can propose alternative approaches to carrying out the center. And the EPA can provide copies of the content to the recipient.)

VI. Project Proposal

All applicants must submit a proposal that identifies their ability to manage the local government compliance assistance center. Project proposals must, at a minimum, include the following items: Executive Summary, Project Activities, the Center Management Plan, Clients Needs, and Available Technologies as outlined below. EPA will negotiate a detailed scope of work with the successful applicant. The successful applicant will be asked to submit a Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance following negotiation of the work plan (See www.whitehouse.gov/OMB/grants/SF424.pdf) Please note that the final application will be subject to the Executive Order 12372 Intergovernmental Review Process. (See www.cfda.gov/public/EO12372.htm) Applicants must clearly mark information they consider Confidential Business Information (CBI). EPA will make final confidentiality decisions in accordance with Agency regulations at 40 CFR Part 2, Subpart B. The applicant should consider the following project proposal format:

Executive Summary: A summary of the planned project.

Project Activities: The proposal should include a description of the following planned activities including milestones. Describe the approach(es) to:

- Maintain and supplement content currently available at www.lgean.org.
- Identify compliance assistance needs and close gaps in environmental compliance assistance materials and services currently provided to local governments.
- Maintain, develop, and enhance working relationship(s) with experts and national organizations devoted to the proper operation, management, and funding of public utilities at the local government level.
- Conduct outreach to the local governments and promote use of the proposed new center.
- Explore and implement revenue generating activities to reduce the local government compliance assistance center's reliance on federal funding;
- Correct, as necessary, content on the web-site that needs to be updated.
- Maintain communications with the local government stakeholders such as the professional associations for government managers, lawyers, and utility engineers.

Management Plan: A thorough discussion of how the grant will be managed, including:

- Internal Management Plan: Describe how the applicant will ensure the day to day success of the project. This description should include the proposed organizational structure, supervisory responsibilities, and a proposed staffing plan.

- External Management Plan: Project proposals must describe how the cooperative agreement recipient will solicit / maintain partners to support the local government compliance assistance center. Illustrate organizational structure between the primary project partners and supporting entities. Please note that all contracts for the purchase of goods and services must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 40 CFR Part 30.
- Marketing and Outreach: A description of a marketing and outreach activity plan to promote the services provided by the local government compliance assistance center.
- Financial Plan: A financial plan for the project that identifies all sources of funds. Although EPA does not require matching funds, the grant recipient is encouraged to provide information regarding resources (cash/in-kind services) that they would commit to manage center. The financial plan should break out planned expenditures by both activity (e.g., maintenance of the web site) and object class (e.g., personnel, travel).

Factors that EPA will evaluate in the financial plan include:

- ~ Ability to partner with other organizations to secure funding or in-kind services to reduce reliance on Federal funding.
- ~ Ability to maintain management control and track costs of the project and maintain required records on funding.

Past Experience and Qualifications of Key Personnel: Project proposals must:

- Describe the applicant's experience in developing and maintaining web based environmental compliance assistance services, or similar projects, and its experience in working with compliance issues related to local governments.
- Provide information on its experience in managing Federal financial assistance, including the results of audits or monitoring by the awarding agency.
- Include a description of the qualifications and experience of key personnel and their responsibilities. A detailed description of how the qualification and/or experience of each key personnel match with his/her responsibilities is important.

Clients Needs: Understanding the environmental needs of local governments is critical to the continued success and sustainability of the local government compliance assistance center.

Project proposals should address the following areas. How will:

- The applicant ensure the web site continues to be useful to the targeted user group(s)?
- The experiences of the key personnel enhance the center's operation?
- The applicant identify the environmental compliance needs of local governments?

Center Technologies/Configuration: The ability to readily seamlessly adopt and maintain the existing center site and associated software is critical. Project proposals should address how:

- The recipient will ensure seamless operation of LGEAN capabilities.
- The recipient will assure that operation and technologies meet the needs of the users as identified by contact with local government and government association representatives.

Collaboration with Other Compliance Assistance Providers: The proposal must explain how LGEAN will interact and collaborate with other compliance assistance providers, government agencies, and organizations. Specifically, the proposal should address the following:

- How the applicant will collaborate with other compliance assistance providers to leverage limited resources.
- Methods that the applicant will use to promote the use of the local government compliance assistance center among other compliance assistance providers.
- How the applicant will evaluate and demonstrate the success of the local government compliance assistance center yearly, including output measurements and, if possible, measurements of risk reduction or compliance improvements for facilities that use the center.

VII. Pre-application Assistance

Eligible and interested applicants may contact Joseph Hall (202/564-2271) with questions regarding eligibility and threshold criteria. EPA will post answers to significant or frequently asked questions on a web-site at <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/assistance/centers/index.html>. Applicants are encouraged to review these questions and answers prior to submitting initial proposals. Please note, the Agency cannot provide guidance on proposal development or other advice that may provide a competitive advantage.

VIII. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

EPA will use the following criteria to rank applications. Each proposal will be given a high, medium or low rating for each criterion. Each criterion will receive equal weight when EPA reviewers determine the overall merit of the proposal. Based on the ratings, EPA reviewers will select up to two proposals for consideration by the Agency selecting official.

1. Comprehensiveness of proposed approach to service delivery.
2. Innovations that may enhance compliance assistance services available to the local governments.
3. Demonstrated understanding of environmental compliance challenges faced by the local governments.
4. Cost effectiveness and efficiency of proposed activities.
5. Qualifications and experience of key personnel in relation to their responsibilities.
6. Previous performance history on similar projects.
7. Soundness of approach to collaborating with other organizations.
8. Soundness of approach to outreach to all segments of the local government sector.
9. Soundness of proposed revenue generating activities that may reduce the center's reliance on Federal funding.

Any disputes that arise during the selection process will be resolved in accordance with 40 CFR 330.63 and Part 31, subpart F. (See web-site at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>.) Please note that EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals or applications and make no awards.

IX. Proposal Submission

Interested applicants should submit three copies of the proposal to the following address to be postmarked by Wednesday, April 30, 2003:

Joseph Hall (2224A)
Office of Compliance, OECA
US Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Each proposal should not exceed 30 pages and it should include all of the information requested in this solicitation with a break down of budget for each category. A team of EPA personnel will evaluate the proposals based on the criteria set forth in Section VI and identify two applications for further consideration. An authorized Agency Approval Official in OECA will select the final applicant. An EPA award official will make the final award. EPA expects to select the final cooperative agreement recipient by Friday, May 23, 2003. The project will not be funded until EPA's operating budget for 2003 receives final approval. For questions, please contact Joseph Hall by phone at (202) 564-2271, fax at (202) 564-7083 or e-mail at hall.joseph@epa.gov.